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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ROME 000346

NOFORN  
SIPDIS

EUR/RPM FOR RAPHAEL CARLAND AND AARON COPE  
OSD/ISA FOR MAGGIE SADOWSKA  
JCS J5 FOR THERESE PAWLOWSKI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/24/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [IT](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: ISAF: MOD LA RUSSA OFFERS SMALL INCREASE IN  
ITALIAN TROOPS, BIG INCREASE IN CARABINIERI

REF: A. ROME 160  
[1](#)B. ROME 341  
[1](#)C. ROME DAILY REPORT 3-23-09  
[1](#)D. ROME 177

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Elizabeth Dibble for reasons 1.4  
(B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary. Italian MOD La Russa told Charge on March 23 that Italy is considering sending to Afghanistan -- in addition to 200 temporary Electoral Support Forces already pledged -- 50 Carabinieri police trainers, two C-27J Transport Aircraft, three medevac helicopters, and up to two additional Tornado aircraft to aid in reconnaissance. This falls short of the up to 500 troop increase that GOI officials have hinted Italy could make. La Russa said that PM Berlusconi might consent to further increases before the NATO Summit, which would likely require raising the current Parliamentary cap, and said that a meeting with SecDef Gates would help to encourage Italian efforts. Charge thanked La Russa for Italian contributions in Afghanistan and elsewhere, noted the success of U.S.-Carabinieri cooperation at CoESPU, and for MOD's public efforts to reassure Sicilian politicians that the planned U.S. Navy satellite communications installation at Niscemi poses no health risk to local communities. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) Charge met with Italian MOD Ignazio La Russa on March 23 to discuss Italian plans for a possible troop increase in Afghanistan. She thanked him for Italian contributions to ISAF and for Italy's input into the USG Afghanistan-Pakistan policy review. La Russa said that the GOI is taking seriously the NATO request for Election Support Forces. He has discussed the matter with PM Berlusconi and decided that Italy can do more. He noted that Italy has been increasing its forces "slowly and quietly, so as not to alarm Italian public opinion" from the low of 2,000 reached last fall (after Italy ceded command of RC-Capital to the French). Troop levels stand at 2,695 at present and will continue to rise as new rotations arrive. (Note: under the current Parliamentary authorization Italy can deploy up to 2,800 troops for the first six months of 2009.)

[1](#)3. (C/NF) After a period of internal review, La Russa said, Italy is prepared to offer -- at a minimum -- the following assets:

-- At least 200 troops (one company) for Election Support Forces (ESF) in RC-West for a period of 5-6 months, and more if changing conditions in theaters like Kosovo permit Italy to free up more troops (Note: Italy already pledged the ESF company in February (Ref A). The GOI, which has about 2,100 troops in Kosovo, adheres to the "in together, out together" NATO principle and was dismayed at the unilateral Spanish withdrawal from KFOR, in part because Spanish troops fall under the Italian sector of KFOR (Ref B). Spain's withdrawal would appear to make it less likely that Italy could redirect troops from KFOR to Afghanistan even if NATO were to agree to this. End Note)

-- two C-27J Transport Aircraft and attendant personnel, to arrive in July, for a total of 40 individuals;

-- three medical evacuation helicopters, to arrive in June, with 34 crew and support;

-- about 50 additional Carabinieri police trainers, roughly doubling the current number;

-- up to two additional Tornado aircraft, assuming that hangar and ramp space can be obtained at the Herat airport (note: current Tornado aircraft and support units have been obliged to operate out of Mazar-i-Sharif before deploying to Herat for this reason).

All told this would raise the current Italian personnel level by 324. In addition, he said, "it is possible to imagine more contributions if the Prime Minister approves them."

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¶4. (SBU) Charge praised the police training skills of the Carabinieri and noted that during her recent visit to CoESPU (Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units) in Vicenza she was impressed by the Carabinieri peacekeeping training program there. This joint U.S.-Italian effort under the G8 framework shows what positive results can be derived by close cooperation between the U.S. and Italy in expanding global police and peacekeeping capacity.

Italian Proposal to Assign Part of Farah to RC-South

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¶5. (C/NF) La Russa said Italian military planners were interested in the possibility of dividing security tasks in RC-West with U.S. troops. Since current U.S. deployment plans call for U.S. troops to deploy to parts of Herat and Farah provinces, Italy would like to suggest an arrangement under which three districts of Farah province (Bakwa, Gulestan, and Delaram) would be carved out and assigned to RC-South. U.S. forces would operate there with no overlap with Italian forces in the rest of the province. This was preferable because information sharing between U.S. and Italian forces is not as seamless as that with British, Australian and Canadian contingents, making U.S.-Italian operational coordination difficult. (Note: Italy has asked to offload portions of RC-West to other commands before -- most recently in parts of Baghdis, which it would like to assign to RC-North. The request to assign three districts to U.S. troops probably reflects MOD's unwillingness to ask PM Berlusconi and MOF Tremonti for the additional troops needed to fully staff their Farah and Herat "battle groups." Charge did not comment on the proposal, but noted that she would pass it to Washington for review. End Note)

¶6. (C/NF) He noted that Italy no longer has caveats, but has seen fit to retain the "remark" giving Rome six hours to reply to any COMISAF request to deploy out-of-area in "in extremis" situations in part because of this lack of full access to information sharing. (Note: GOI officials have told us previously that they would be willing to drop the remark in exchange for access to greater intel-sharing, despite the fact that the remark constitutes a minimal

impediment to ISAF operational flexibility now that Italy dropped its geographic caveats in 2008)

¶7. (C/NF) La Russa also noted that Italy and Spain were each supposed to shoulder one half of the burden of staffing the Forward Support Base (FSB) at Herat airport. The Spanish were only staffing 20 per cent at present, leading Italy to consider taking over the entire FSB. Finally, IT Chief of Defense Camporini observed that some of the 600 Italian troops still in RC-Capital might be freed up for redeployment to RC-West when the Turks assume command of RC-Capital at the end of the year.

Niscemi Antennae Controversy: La Russa Willing to Weigh In  
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¶8. (SBU) Charge thanked MOD La Russa for MOD's defense before Parliament of the U.S. Navy's planned satellite communications installation near Niscemi in Sicily (Ref C), and passed him informational slides on the project. She noted that U.S. Navy technical experts had recently briefed the Italian Defense General Staff (IDGS) on the negligible health and environmental risks posed by the MUOS (Multiple User Objective System) antennae to be built in Sicily under the project (which MOD approved in 2006), and that the Base Commander of NAS Sigonella was preparing to brief local mayors. La Russa thanked her for her reassurance that the antennae would not be harmful to local populations, and indicated that he might use the slides to respond to queries.

CHOD Camporini indicated that IDGS was satisfied with U.S. studies predicting that antenna emissions would constitute less than one per cent of the current Italian and EU limits.

Looking for a SecDef Meeting  
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¶9. (SBU) La Russa's Political Adviser Alessandro Ruben said that a visit from Secretary of Defense Gates to Italy would help to signal U.S. satisfaction with Italy's potential new offers in Afghanistan.

¶10. (C/NF) Comment: MOD La Russa's advisers have hinted to us that he wants credit for any eventual Italian offer in Afghanistan, that he is worried lest FM Frattini's pledge of 2,800-3,000 troops (made during his February 26-27 visit to Washington) eclipse his own efforts, and that he is pressing PM Berlusconi and MOF Tremonti to agree to ask Parliament to raise the existing 6 month cap of 2,800 troops. The package of offers that he presented to the Charge, while positive (particularly with regard to Carabinieri trainers, which would fill a need clearly identified in Kabul and Brussels), falls short of the level that Italy could obtain if it went back to Parliament with a request for more troops. The obstacle is not Parliament, where Berlusconi enjoys a comfortable majority, but in the cabinet, where reluctance to spend more on defense threatens to undermine Italian NATO contributions and defense readiness (Ref D). Post will work to verify the details of the evolving offer, and would appreciate an assessment of the likelihood, however remote, of a meeting between La Russa and SecDef in Rome or in Washington. End Comment.

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